

“I thought I was my grandmother”¹

Djuna Barnes and the Reconfiguration of the Family Romance

Mary Leonard

One reason why the difficult literary texts of the American modernist Djuna Barnes have sometimes frustrated readers is that many are unaware of the autobiographical subtexts and issues driving much of her writing. Barnes was born into a gender “utopia” created by her feminist and socialist grandmother and father, but a utopia doomed to failure because of flaws inherent in its theory and practice. This essay will show how the dynamics of this community shaped Djuna’s evolution into an adult writing subject who would repeatedly rewrite her own incest narrative and ponder questions of gender identity. The first section will discuss theories of child development and gender formation. The second will demonstrate how, in Djuna’s case, the process of gender formation differs from the standard paradigms.

As feminists have pointed out, Freud’s theories have gone more deeply into explanations of the development of boys than of girls, to the degree that, as late as the 1930’s, he could still remark that as far as the psychoanalytic understanding of women went, they were still “a dark continent” (qtd. in *Difference* 13). Underlying this analysis of the family was the assumption that gender formation generally occurs in the context of a heterosexual monogamous nuclear family where the important players are the mother, father and child. Hence, the primary attachment of the child, in the pre-Oedipal phase, is to the mother. In the ensuing phase, the male child realizes his gendered difference from the mother. According to Chodorow, this stage initiates not only the perception of difference between mother and child but also gender differentiation:

Both sexes establish separateness in relationship to their mother, and internalizations in the development of self take in aspects of the mother as well. But because the mother is a woman, these experiences differ by gender. Though children of both sexes are originally part of herself, a mother unconsciously and often consciously experiences her son as more of an “other” than her daughter. Reciprocally, a

son’s male core gender identity develops away from his mother. The male’s self, as a result, becomes based on a more fixed “me” - “not me” distinction. Separateness and difference as a component of differentiation become more salient. By contrast, the female’s self is less separate and involves a less fixed “me” - “not me” distinction, creating [...] difficulties with a sense of separateness and autonomy. (13)

However, what might in one light appear to be female weakness can, in another light be seen as female strength: “A ‘true self,’ or ‘central self,’ emerges through the experience of continuity that the mother or caretaker helps to provide, by protecting the infant from having to react to and ward off environmental intrusions and from being in need” (9) and:

These several senses of agency, of a true self that does not develop reactively, of a relational self or ego core, and of an internal continuity of being, are fundamental to an unproblematic sense of self, and provide the basis of both autonomy and spontaneity. The strength, or wholeness, of the self in this view, does not depend only or even centrally on its degree of separateness, although the extent of confident distinctness certainly affects and is part of the sense of self. The more secure the central self, or ego core, the less one has to define one’s self through separateness from others. Separateness becomes, then, a more rigid, defensive, rather fragile, secondary criterion of the strength of the self and of the “success” of individuation. (10)

For Lacan, the realization of difference occurs when the child sees him/herself in the mirror, and is expressed in the symbolic language the child enters into as s/he learns to speak and comes to realize the difference between signifier and signified. The child, when socialized, passes out of a world of semiotic indifferentiation associated with maternal union into a world of symbolic difference associated with the “law of the father,” the person who occupies the position of great-

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est power in this nuclear family. In the ensuing phase, boys and girls realize the genital characteristics which differentiate them from each other. Having realized these differences, the Oedipal phase is then characterized by the boy's incestuous desire for the mother, and the girl's incestuous desire for the father. Cases of father-daughter incest or mother-son incest, though considered taboo because they destabilize the social order in which parents justify their claim to power on the basis of their moral commitment to and responsibility for the rest of the family, are not unheard of (Gallop 70-1). Instances of heterosexual incest are understood as cases in which, because these desires are gratified rather than sublimated, the boy or girl does not go on to the exogamous heterosexual relationships which Freud saw as a necessary cornerstone upon which civilization is founded – “the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex” (156) – since the sublimation of the son's desire to sleep with the mother and kill the father results in redirecting this energy into the development of culture. Thus, for Freud, it was “a most surprising discovery that the problems of social psychology, too, should prove soluble on the basis of one single concrete point – man's relationship to his father” (157).

The central role of the Oedipus Complex in gender formation with its emphasis on male development has been questioned by critics who see gender formation as a more continuous process and who, like Chodorow, focus on both male and female development. Judith Butler and Gayle Rubin both argue that there is no reason to believe that babies are born either heterosexual or homosexual since, as Rubin writes, gender construction begins long before the Oedipus phase and proceeds via the establishment of a series of prohibitions which “divide the universe of sexual choice into categories of permitted and prohibited sexual partners” (173). Therefore, according to Butler:

The young boy and young girl who enter the Oedipal drama with incestuous heterosexual aims have already been subjected to prohibitions which “dispose” them in distinct sexual directions. Hence, the dispositions which Freud assumes to be primary or constitutive facts of sexual

life are effects of a law which, internalized, produces and regulates discrete gender identity and heterosexuality. (64)

If this is true, “the taboo against homosexuality must precede the heterosexual incest taboo; the taboo against homosexuality in effect creates the heterosexual “dispositions” by which the Oedipal conflict becomes possible” (64). If so:

the incest taboo, then, would repress no primary dispositions, but effectively create the distinction between “primary” and “secondary” dispositions to describe and reproduce the distinction between a legitimate heterosexuality and an illegitimate homosexuality. Indeed, if we conceive of the incest taboo as primarily productive in its effects, then the prohibition that founds the “subject” and survives as the law of its desire becomes the means by which identity, particularly gender identity, is constituted. (73)

Gender identity, she concludes, is “performatively constructed by the same ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (25). Hence, since our notions of what constitutes these identities is not indelibly imprinted in us, our ideas of what masculine or feminine appearance or behavior is change over time. Likewise, conceptions of what constitutes homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual identity or behavior also change.

Freud's idea of a universal incest prohibition which serves as a foundation for culture has also been questioned by many who note that his research initially led him to the seduction theory in which he claimed that neurosis in patients was often the product of memories of childhood molestation. When Freud rejected the seduction theory for the Oedipus theory, he claimed that accounts in which children said they had been molested were, instead, expressions of Oedipal fantasies in which the child imagined a wished-for relationship. One explanation of this shift raises serious questions about the validity of the Oedipus complex as opposed to the earlier account of incest in the seduction theory. As Martin writes:

In 1886, Freud published his conclusions in the “Aetiology of Hysteria”. When he read this paper to the Vienna Society for Psychiatry and Neurology, it met

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with an icy reception. The Psychoanalytic Society was struggling for acceptance and unwilling to support this revolutionary theory of mental illness – that is, that sexual experiences in childhood were the major cause of neurotic behavior in adults. Freud and his seduction theory were rejected, and members of the society closed ranks. In less than 2 years, Freud radically revised his thinking; the Oedipal complex, published in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in early 1899, was the result [...] This new theory was acceptable to the Psychoanalytic Society, and Freud was soon an active member. (10)

A century after the publication of the Oedipus theory, the degree to which incest exists in the world, as well as its significance, are topics still much debated. That there is still slippage concerning even what the word “incest” means suggests an underlying confusion which should be addressed before jumping to conclusions about incestuous family dynamics in Barnes’s case.

Generally understood to connote an unacceptable sexual relationship between family members, incest is assumed to be abusive and universally prohibited. But, this definition is not stable over time. In the French Middle Ages, for example, incest connoted not only a sexual relationship between family members, but any prohibited sexual relationship (Walecka). Martin asserts that “since antiquity incest and other forms of child sexual abuse have been commonplace in both Western and Eastern cultures and [...] these cultures continue today” (8). Janus argues that incest can be “a positive, healthy experience” (qtd. in Martin 8). And, recent studies documenting the percentage of abused children in the general population, give statistics ranging from 1% to 80 (qtd. in Martin 9). These widely differing conclusions, researchers argue, are due to the fact that what constitutes sexual abuse has not been clearly defined:

Investigators have tended to use widely varying and often ambiguous criteria for defining sexual abuse [...] These discrepant definitions are then applied to the examination of questions such as the prevalence and psychological sequelae of abuse, resulting in divergent findings [...] Without

more detailed information regarding the distribution of abuse characteristics, it is difficult to establish reasonable criteria for grouping or categorizing degrees and types of sexual abuse that appear to lead to appreciable levels of psychological trauma. (Gold 324)

They conclude that “to treat sexual abuse as a dichotomous variable (i.e., absent vs. present) is a gross oversimplification” and stress “the need and importance of more extensive and detailed research in the area of childhood sexual molestation on the characteristics of the abuse itself” (333).

Given such conflicting assumptions, how can we understand what constitutes healthy sexuality in a young girl and what should be seen as abuse? As I understand it, a relationship is abusive when it creates trauma or psychological problems. Hence, in theory at least, an incestuous relationship based on mutual affection, with the willing participation of both people could be healthy. But, can such a relationship exist between a child and an adult? For Affeld-Niemeyer, it cannot because children involved in incest “surrender their own perception of reality under the influence of the abuser’s meaning system” leading to “a permanent impairment of reality functioning even in adulthood, and also to a continuing vulnerability” (23). Unable to establish boundaries between themselves and this person, they experience “the blocking of further development in certain aspects of their personality at a particular developmental stage: the undifferentiated stage of primary ambiguity (Bleger 1990) or of primitive unconscious identity (Jung 1921)” (24). She concludes, on the basis of her work with women who have experienced incest:

I no longer believe that children who are subjected to sexual violation and have helplessly experienced the deadly distortion of their adaptability, themselves “wanted” this violence on the grounds of their infantile sexuality, their oedipal phantasy, or because it made them “feel nice”. In the end they wanted what they did not want, because the abuser’s will entered into them like poison, usurped their self and paralysed it. (39)

As if this wasn’t confusing enough, there is yet

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another variable, the sex of the adult participant. Gold's study of women abused in childhood found that only 2% of these relationships were with adult women only; 7% involved both women and men while 91% involved only men (327). Cases dealt with by Affeld-Niemeyer involved men and girls. But, for de Beauvoir, erotic relationships of young girls with each other or older women which mainly involve caresses are a common phase girls go through before becoming interested in men.

While acknowledging that this discussion is far from over, we can draw certain conclusions from it: that incestuous relationships, while being "prohibited," are probably far more common than generally thought; that there is some question about whether an incestuous relationship is always abusive; that there is some basis for concluding that incestuous relationships between girls and women are less often perceived to be abusive than those between girls and men; and that issues related to the establishment of boundaries and the development of a core self are associated with sexual relationships between children and older family members.

Particularly interesting is the possibility that incest between a girl and a loving woman like Djuna's grandmother could be a positive experience, or have positive elements since, as my account of Djuna's relationship with her grandmother will show, this was a complex relationship with both positive and negative aspects.

Crucial for understanding Barnes family psychodynamics is an understanding of Zadel Barnes, the family matriarch, whose ideas about gender, sexuality and writing were all-important in shaping her granddaughter's sensibility. Zadel was a successful writer who espoused radical socialist and gender politics. Though married for much of her adult life, she may have had lesbian relationships (Field 173). Zadel lived in London from 1880 to 1889, where she immersed herself in the ferment of its feminist and socialist circles, and then returned home, influenced by utopian socialist projects like those of Rousseau, Fourier and Marx, and the gender politics of her European friends, with the plan of creating a new world of sexual and artistic freedom on an isolated farm. Her brand of sentimental utopianism draws on what Catherine Stimpson has

called "the myth of women's difference in which genteel Victorian women believed, and which they manipulated" (Vicinus x). As Stimpson points out, such essentialist mythologizing of female power and virtue has "insidious dangers" (x), dangers which will become apparent since, as we will see, the community Zadel founded could not escape the contradictions and conflicts which would eventually cause its collapse.

Djuna was born in 1892. The oldest granddaughter of Zadel, Field argues that she was "the proper progeny and prodigy to fulfill the literary aspirations of Zadel" (179). Djuna's 1935 statement, "I always thought I *was* my grandmother," also suggests the importance of this symbiotic relationship in the construction of her identity.

One of the main ways Zadel influenced Djuna was via education. Like all the Barnes children, Djuna attended school only when it was necessary to keep truant officers away. For all intents and purposes, the idiosyncratic education Zadel's grandchildren received was what she and her son Wald taught them. In contrast to the rote-learning then typical in schools, this personalized education was grounded in socialism, feminism and the arts.

The Harper & Row autobiographical note gives equal importance to Zadel and Wald in the education of Wald's children [...] but Mina Loy's daughter recalls that Djuna told her mother that she had really been educated by her grandmother Zadel, and that it was from her that she received all her talent and encouragement. (Field 175)

Djuna's father attempted to establish himself as the patriarch of this community, not only by emphasizing his role as master of the farm, but also via his sexual possession of as many women, and even animals, as possible (Field 181, 184), as well as the self-importance he accorded himself as the begetter of many children. After marrying Djuna's mother, Wald took another wife and lived with both women and the children he fathered by them.

These attempts at patriarchal domination via the sexual domination of his world culminated in his attempt to initiate Djuna into this world via the taking of her virginity at the age of sixteen, an event which she would later chronicle in varying

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personal accounts and literary narratives as a rape. Depending on which account is accepted, Wald attempted to rape Djuna, did rape her, and/or gave her sexually to another man as Old Testament patriarchs bestow their daughters. It is hard to know exactly what happened given the varying versions, but it seems clear, in light of the brutality which recurs in Barnes's versions of the event, that, whether literally or metaphorically, the loss of her virginity was experienced as a violation perpetrated on her by Wald.

In the context of Barnes family dynamics, one cannot read patriarchy as it is usually read in feminist accounts that assume it to be the dominant structure of the society women live in. As Gallop's analysis of patriarchy illustrates when applied to the Barnes family, Wald's claims to the status of patriarch are exactly what should deprive him of that status. Placing Luce Irigaray into conversation with Freud, Gallop reads the daughter's, i.e. Irigaray's, relation to the father, i.e. Freud, under patriarchy as follows:

The daughter's desire for her father is desperate: "the only redemption for her as a girl would be to seduce the father [...]" (Speculum, p. 106) If the phallus is the standard of value, then the Father, possessor of the phallus, must desire the daughter in order to give her value [...] The father's refusal to seduce the daughter, to be seduced by her [...], gives him another kind of seduction [...], a veiled seduction in the form of the law. The daughter submits to the father's rule, which prohibits the father's desire, the father's penis, out of the desire to seduce the father by doing his bidding and thus pleasing him. (70-1)

The portrayal of the rape as a violent assault on an innocent girl, which is characteristic of Barnes's accounts, demonstrates that Wald's attempts to impose patriarchy in this manner were those most guaranteed to fail since, as Gallop explains, "patriarchy is grounded in the uprightness of the father. If he were devious and unreliable, he could not have the power to legislate. The law is supposed to be just – that is, impartial, indifferent, free from desire". (75)

If Barnes's subsequent life-long rejection of her father's patriarchal claims are made clear by her comments about him and her literary paro-

dies of him, her love and total acceptance of her grandmother when young are also clear: "I loved [Zadel] as a child usually loves its mother – I cared little or nothing for the rest of the family" (Review 111). One reason for this must be the centrality of the role that Zadel played in educating Djuna and instilling her own values and interests in her. But, Djuna's early identification with Zadel ran deeper than this because it was also sexual.

Critics have seen the physical relationship between the two differently. Though Field provides suggestive information about the Barnes family, he stops short of calling this relationship incestuous. Herring concludes, despite providing evidence from Djuna herself that she slept in the same bed with Zadel and played with her breasts, and citing "sexually explicit" material in the correspondence between the two (112) that, "whatever happened, incest is surely too strong a word" (112) because "the relationship in bed ultimately matters if Djuna sustained psychological damage or some sense of empowerment but there is no evidence that she did" (115). To my mind, the very existence of these letters, supported by the citations given above of Barnes's comments, demonstrate that the relationship was incestuous. It also seems obvious that this relationship, by its very nature, must have had profound effects on Djuna. The two critics who do analyze it as incestuous are, however, diametrically opposed in their assessment of what these effects were.

Dalton reads the relationship as abusive: "Barnes felt profoundly ambivalent about her grandmother's molestation, and that, at least at times, she felt overwhelming rage as a result of the trauma" (124), and argues that this rage surfaces in the hostile feminine imagery of Barnes's stage directions for the set of her play *The Dove*:

The decoration is garish, dealing heavily in reds and pinks. There is an evident attempt to make the place look luxuriously sensual. The furniture is all of the reclining type.

The walls are covered with striped paper in red and white. Only two pictures are evident, one of the Madonna and child, and one of an early English tandem race.

There are firearms everywhere. Many

groups of swords, ancient and modern, are secured to the walls. A pistol or two lie in chairs, etc.

There is only one door, which leads out into the back hall directly back centre. (qtd. in Dalton 127)

For Dalton, “the set appears to be a perverse womb – one which conflates the relations among sensuality, violence and mothering” (127):

Broe, in contrast, argues for the “healing” effects of this “nanophilia” (41-86), arguing that, via the erotic images of Zadel’s letters, Djuna’s grandmother: redrew (quite literally) the hierarchies of gender and power outside the sphere of male authority [...] Their only syntax is that of the eternal present where a mythical world of breasts merges with breasts in the fullness of puissance feminine. (53)

Broe reads this relationship as a protective *response* to Wald’s abusive treatment of Djuna. However, evidence indicates that it *pre*-dated Wald’s violation of Djuna, leading me to a different reading of the relationships between Zadel, Wald and Djuna.

In my view, Zadel and Wald shared an interest in continuing the balance of matriarchal and patriarchal power needed to maintain the endogamous society they had created. Djuna played a pivotal role in this society since she was an object of desire for both her father and grandmother, and possession of her was equated with occupying the dominant position in the family. Problems arose when Djuna began to threaten the endogamous nature of this society by asserting her independence from the family. A power struggle ensued in which Wald, the weak patriarch, attempted, via a ritualized sexual possession of Djuna, to reassert his power over her and to contest Zadel’s matriarchal position. But, instead of bringing Djuna back into the family, Wald’s violent imposition of patriarchal power and Zadel’s failure to protect Djuna from it traumatized her and alienated her from them both, leading to the disintegration of the family structure they had created.

Implicit in Broe’s reading is the assumption that the relationship between Zadel and Djuna is a protective response to Wald’s abuse of Djuna. However, the fact that Djuna had slept in the

same bed with Zadel for years and her semiotic fusion with Zadel made apparent in her statement, “I thought I *was* my grandmother,” suggests that their relationship had been an intimate one, whether or not it was clearly incestuous, for many years. Likewise, her statement, “I loved [Zadel] as a child usually loves its mother – I cared little or nothing for the rest of the family,” suggests both Zadel’s initial success in installing herself as matriarch in Djuna’s eyes, and the fact that, as a child, Djuna did not experience their relationship as abusive.

Vicinus’s analysis of homoerotic relationships between Victorian women suggests a way to understand this relationship. The feminized space in which Zadel played teacher to Djuna’s student bears a resemblance to Vicinus’s description of the homoerotic culture of Victorian girls’ boarding schools in where it was the norm for young girls or younger teachers to have crushes on older teachers in which “differences in age and desire created a distance that intensified desire” (188). Such relationships were not generally seen as transgressive but rather as the norm. In isolated communities from which men were barred, “homoerotic friendships were an important means to maturity” (189) since “adolescent rebellion was to be circumvented by keeping a ‘good’ friendship within the family circle, ideally leading without conflict to a happy marriage” (188). Thus, “friendships were not labeled deviant until the early years of the twentieth century. Rather, only their excess, the uncontrolled was labeled as wrong” (189).

De Beauvoir also considered such relationships a stage of female development since, while boys are encouraged to direct desire outward, girls are encouraged to narcissistically become objects of desire:

There are lesbian tendencies in almost all young girls, tendencies that are hardly distinguishable from narcissistic enjoyment: each one covets in the other the softness of her own skin, the modeling of her own curves; and in her self-adoration is implied the worship of femininity in general. Man is, sexually speaking, subject, and therefore men are normally separated from each other by the desire that drives them towards an object different from

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themselves. But woman is the absolute object of desire, and that is the reason why so many “special friendships” flourish in schools, colleges, and studios. (343)

Barnes’s own description in *Nightwood* of a narcissism inherent in lesbian desire expresses her similar view: “A man is another person – a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own” (119). The desired woman is attractive as a model of what the girl herself might aspire to be as an adult: “In the love she gives an older woman the young girl is in love with her own future: she would identify herself with her idol” (de Beauvoir 347).

Such a school-girl crush on a teacher strongly suggests the relationship between Djuna and Zadel, as can be inferred from a 1906 letter from Zadel to the fourteen-year-old Djuna, in which she refers to herself as “the grandmother you adore and id[o]lize”.² Whereas the eroticism of such a relationship should, according to Victorian standards of propriety, have been sublimated, it was not in this case.

In February of 1909, a threat to this closed community arose when a romance began between Djuna and a neighborhood boy, Roy. Herring is the only critic who has noticed this romance (59) and he makes no comment about its significance. In my view, however, it is extremely significant since it represents an incursion from the outer world into this endogamous world. As de Beauvoir explains, it is common for the adolescent girl to grow out of the kind of romantic idolization of an older woman Djuna felt for Zadel³ and Djuna’s interest in this boy suggests the beginning of such a move. Competing now with the claims that Zadel and Wald have made on Djuna are Roy’s claims. Zadel’s reaction upon learning about this boy is telling: “I am shocked. Fancy you having a young man! Oh fie!”⁴ Her instructions to Djuna to reject him show the difference between the mores of the outside world and those of the Barnes world, and make the fear and jealousy underlying Zadel’s supposedly “free” love clear:

You would (in case he actually did “propose”!) have to tell him very kindly that you appreciated it as the highest honor he could show, but you felt sure that both he + you were too young and inexperienced

to decide at present anything so momentous. You were sure on your part that you did not feel as he wanted to have you feel – but you liked him very much as a friend and companion + you hoped he would try to be satisfied with that. Tell him you do not feel prepared as yet for either engagement or marriage (he must not know your views on marriage and sex questions – they would certainly become common gossip!) [...] All this and to like effect to be spoken not written.⁵

The resentment Dalton reads in *The Dove* can now be more specifically located if we read this relationship as a move by Djuna away from the family and towards independence in reaction to Wald’s assertion of power over her, and then an attempt by Zadel to counter Djuna’s move.

Various critics have discussed Djuna’s subsequent relationship with Percy Faulkner, but none have seen the connection to her relationship with Roy. As early as an April 1909 letter, Zadel refers to Percy, the fifty-two-year-old brother of Wald’s second wife Fanny Faulkner, sending Djuna love letters. Djuna “was ‘given’ to Percy Faulkner [...] in 1910 by Wald and Zadel” (Field 43) and “reluctantly ‘married’ Percy” in a “ceremony without benefit of clergy in Zadel’s room” (Herring 60). “Zadel Gustafson [...] act[ed] collusively with the father, her son, guaranteeing not only the paternal transmission but his primacy by advocating the ‘bride price’ of the civil ‘wedding’ to Percy Faulkner” (Broe 53). In other words, Zadel retained matriarchal power by participating in Wald’s patriarchal bestowal of Djuna on Percy.

Herring claims that Djuna “clearly seems to have loved Percy at first, or at least be flattered by his attentions” (60). I disagree. Given Zadel’s shocked reaction to Djuna’s new boyfriend, I read this arranged marriage to a familiar of the family as a strategy on the part of Wald and Zadel for coercing Djuna into remaining within the endogamous family sphere. A passage from a draft of *Nightwood* sheds light on the significance of these events for Djuna:

Then at sixteen, standing at the break of day in the dust of crossroads, a boy asked me to kiss him and I kissed him, and he said, “Thank you,” and I laughed because

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I knew that was not the answer, though what he should have said I hadn't the faintest idea. Then he went away because he was dying of something incurable and hot in him, though he was only a boy of eighteen. And then I had a lover and a doll, and because he was a man who had held me on his knee when I was a child, and because I had a doll and ate caramels, and look up at him and said "Yes," he couldn't bear it. He thought, perhaps, he was bored, but it was something else; he was an old man then and he wanted something simpler and older, so he took me away to a transients' hotel in Bridgeport [...] Then I remembered the ceremony beside the Christmas tree, when my father and my grandmother stood by, and my mother by the door in her apron, crying and thinking God knows what; and he put the ring on my finger and I kissed him. Before that, it must have been two hours, I had gone down on the floor and hugged my grandmother by her knees, dropping my head down, saying, "Don't let it happen!" and she said, "It had to happen." (qtd. in Herring 61-3)

Where Herring understands the description of the boy's disease literally, Zadel's letters suggest to me that the "something incurable and hot in him" has more to do with the unfulfilled love of a rather innocent boy chased away by the Barnes family.

The descriptions of pleading with Zadel suggest that Djuna experienced this symbolic "marriage" as betrayal. She stayed with Percy only two months, and, after returning to her family, moved to New York City in 1911 or 1912 (Herring 63-4). Field suggests that the "marriage" and the events surrounding it motivated Djuna's mother to divorce Wald in 1912.⁶ Djuna's anger at Zadel is also apparent in the fact that she refused to respond to her letters after she had moved away.⁷

The marriage Wald and Zadel engineered is an unusual variant of what Freud describes as the basis of patriarchal culture, the exogamous exchange of women by men. For Freud, exogamy is only possible after the repression of incestuous Oedipal desire. The male earns his legitimacy as a patriarch with power over the women of his

family by repressing his desire for them and converting them into commodities. In exogamy, Butler writes, "the bride functions as a relational term between groups of men; she does not *have* an identity, and neither does she exchange one identity for another. She *reflects* masculine identity precisely through being the site of its absence" (39). The Barnes household, however, was not such a patriarchy. In it, Oedipal desires were not repressed; they were expressed. The glue holding the family together was expressive maternal love rather than the repressive "law of the father". The basis of power rested in the reciprocation of this love on the part of the object of desire, Djuna. Djuna functioned both as Zadel's heir-apparent and as commodity since possession of her consolidated Zadel's matriarchal status. Thus, she became emblematic not of male authority, but of female authority. When she writes, "I thought I *was* my grandmother," she describes herself as an empty space which Zadel projects herself onto. Thus, power is maintained, not via exogamy but via the continuance of this matriarchal relationship which reinforces endogamy.

What both Zadel and Wald unsuccessfully attempted in their commodification of Djuna – at the same time, ironically, as they sang the praises of freedom – was the preservation of their own insular family. Wald's attempts to control Djuna were less successful than Zadel's loving strategies. But Zadel, attempting to contain rather than support Djuna's growing independence, also failed.

Djuna's rupture with Wald was definitive but her relationship to Zadel remained more complex. There is room here to acknowledge both Broe's reading of this relationship as nurturing and Dalton's reading of it as abusive. Its importance in structuring Djuna's adult life is apparent in the many parallels which can be drawn between her and Zadel. Like her grandmother, Djuna sought personal, creative and economic independence through writing. Like Zadel, she first worked as a journalist and was then sent to Europe as a correspondent. And, like Zadel, her European experiences helped her define her own personal and creative philosophies. In Zadel's case, mixing with proponents of radical social change in London led her to envision her own utopia. In Djuna's case, encounters

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with other modernist and feminist radicalisms in Paris during the 1920's led her to exorcise the dystopia her family life had become and replace it, at least briefly, with a more successful utopia of her own imagining.

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Notes

- 1 Djuna letter to Emily Coleman, December 14, 1935.
- 2 Zadel letter to Djuna, November 12, 1906.
- 3 "Unless the idol's superiority is exceptional, she soon loses her aura" (347).
- 4 Zadel letter to Djuna, February 22, 1909.
- 5 Zadel letter to Djuna, February 18, 1909.
- 6 "It did happen, and the outrage is the shadowplay behind all her art. Afterwards, Elizabeth divorced Wald" (43).
- 7 Zadel's 1912 letters.

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